

Puerto Rico Focus Groups on Why Households Did Not Mail Back the Census 2000 Questionnaire

FINAL REPORT

This evaluation study reports the results of research and analysis undertaken by the U.S. Census Bureau. It is part of a broad program, the Census 2000 Testing, Experimentation, and Evaluation (TXE) Program, designed to assess Census 2000 and to inform 2010 Census planning. Findings from the Census 2000 TXE Program reports are integrated into topic reports that provide context and background for broader interpretation of results.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fifty-three percent of the households in Puerto Rico returned their Census 2000 questionnaires by mail, a low response rate when compared with the national rate of 65 percent. But Census 2000 was the first time that residents of Puerto Rico were asked to complete and return their questionnaires by mail. (Stateside had been responding by mail since 1970.) In 1990, enumerators had gone door to door to collect the information from all identified housing units, and had brought the questionnaires back with them. In 2000, the update/leave procedure was used. Given that Census 2000 was the first time households in Puerto Rico were asked to follow new procedures, a 53 percent mail response rate was respectable. Still, there is room for improvement.

Toward that end, this evaluation explored the reasons residents of Puerto Rico hadn't mailed back their Census 2000 questionnaires. We conducted focus groups in nine sites across the Island with 41 household heads who hadn't returned their questionnaires by mail. Sites were selected for geographic and socioeconomic diversity from among municipalities (municipios) with lower-than-average (under 50 percent) mailback response rates. Although interesting and suggestive, these results are based on a small, purposive sample and cannot be generalized to the Puerto Rican population as a whole. However, they do provide a useful jumping off point for further thinking and research.

Participants' reasons for not having returned their Census 2000 questionnaires by mail fall into four clusters:

- Motivational and process-related reasons. Several participants were unclear about or misunderstood the census' purpose, including thinking it had to do with taxation or assignment of welfare benefits. Considerable confusion existed over the process by which the questionnaires were distributed, the rules for returning them and especially the role of enumerators.
- Practical and logistical reasons. Lack of time figured as a reason, especially for working mothers, as did difficulties of mailing and getting to the post office, especially for residents of interior communities.
- Cultural and political attitudinal reasons. These included fears that the information wouldn't be kept confidential, which might result in loss of government benefits, as well as the belief that any funds that would be allocated would only end up enriching dishonest politicians. Participants also expressed a strong preference for a more personal approach to collecting the information as being more appropriate to Puerto Rican culture.
- Reasons related to questionnaire content and design. Some participants were affronted by the race and ethnicity questions, which were seen as divisive as well as inappropriate to the realities of Puerto Rican society. These questions elicited the strongest negative reactions of any of the questions from participants in coastal communities. Participants across the Island also complained that the financial questions on the long form were too intrusive and difficult to answer. Over all, the long form was seen as excessively long,

overly complex, and hard to understand, especially (but not only) for persons with little formal schooling.

Almost everyone had heard something about Census 2000 from television and radio ads, newspapers, schools, or informal sources such as relatives and neighbors. But in many cases, advertising efforts had fallen flat. Some complained that the advertising was too much like political campaign hype, which made them leery of its true purpose. Others felt that the advertising had overemphasized the importance of returning the questionnaire and failed to explain satisfactorily the census' purpose. Of the 41 nonresponding household heads, virtually everyone urged a return to the system of collecting data door to door as practiced in 1990.

From those findings come our recommendations for improvements and for further research and exploration. However, the recommendations are only tentative and suggestive, pending further research with a statistically representative sample. Key recommendations:

- **Provide more-comprehensive information, in different forms, on the purpose and uses of the census. This information should be presented in a way that allays misplaced fears and directly addresses common misconceptions (such as that census information will be used for taxation purposes). Disseminate this information in different venues and through a variety of community channels (such as schools, church groups, neighborhood associations).**
- **Conduct further research in Puerto Rico on views and perceptions of the Census 2000 questions on race and ethnicity, which drew such strong negative reactions from participants in more-urban, coastal communities.¹ Compare this to similar relevant research conducted stateside to try to establish commonalities and differences between the Puerto Rican case and others.**
- **Use the findings and recommendations from this study, as well as other supporting testing and research, to develop advertising appeals for census participation more attuned to the Puerto Rican populace.**
- **Consider using the results of this study to create a close-ended survey to be administered to a probability sample of residents of the Island. The survey could seek the respondents' views of different approaches to data collection for the census and their reactions to the content of any new materials or advertisements developed on the basis of the specific recommendations offered above.**

¹ Research of this type was conducted as part of this task. Focus groups were held in 12 communities across the Island with a diverse group of participants to explore their views and perceptions of Question 8 (on ethnicity) and Question 9 (on race).

1. BACKGROUND

Fifty-three percent of the households in Puerto Rico returned their Census 2000 forms by mail, a low response rate when compared with the national rate of 65 percent. But Census 2000 was the first census in Puerto Rico to include a mailback component. Indeed, procedures changed greatly between the 1990 and 2000 censuses.

In 1990, each of the more than 1.1 million housing units then identified in Puerto Rico was visited by an enumerator, who brought back a questionnaire for that unit. In 2000, the Puerto Rican government chose to use the same questionnaire content as was used stateside. The update/leave procedure was used for data collection. More specifically, the official procedures were as follows:

- Between February 28 and March 2, 2000, the U.S. Postal Service delivered an advance letter addressed to "Residential Customer" to all housing units in Puerto Rico with mail delivery. One side of the advance letter was in English, the other in Spanish. The advance letter alerted households that the Census 2000 questionnaire would be delivered soon.
- Between March 3 and March 30, 2000, census enumerators delivered a mailing package addressed to the housing unit or containing geocode information (assignment area, block number, and map spot number). If there was no address, a description of the housing unit (such as "the white house with the red tile roof next to the Dairy Queen") was available on the enumerator listing page, but was not found on the mailing packages. The questionnaires were in Spanish and included an 800 number to call for help, if needed. Persons wishing English questionnaires (slightly different from the stateside version) could get them by calling the help number. As on the mainland, about 83 percent of households in Puerto Rico received the short form, and about 17 percent, the long form.
- Between March 27 and March 30, 2000, the U.S. Postal Service delivered a reminder postcard to "Residential Customer." This was a large postcard, half in English and half in Spanish, that served as a thank you to those who had mailed back their questionnaires and a reminder to those who hadn't.

Since Census 2000 was the first time respondents in Puerto Rico were asked to return their questionnaires by mail, there may be reasons peculiar to Puerto Rico for a mailback response rate lower than the stateside rate. The purpose of this evaluation is to explore the reasons that more respondents in Puerto Rico didn't return their Census 2000 questionnaires by mail and to see how these reasons may vary across different parts of the Island and among different demographic groups. By providing an in-depth understanding of the reasons for mailback nonresponse in Puerto Rico, this evaluation will help to inform and improve future Census efforts on the Island.²

²No comparable research was done stateside to explore reactions to new procedures initiated in 1960 (when questionnaires were mailed, but picked up by enumerators) or 1970 (when mailout/mailback was first used extensively). However, during this period, there were indications of increased resistance to

This report presents findings from the evaluation and recommendations for future practice and further research. However, given that they are based on findings that cannot be generalized to the wider population of household heads in Puerto Rico, these recommendations are only tentative and suggestive, pending broader corroboration.

2. METHODS

The evaluation used a primarily qualitative method. We conducted focus groups between late July and early October 2000, with a purposive sample of household heads in nine³ communities across the Island, to explore the reasons they hadn't mailed back their Census 2000 questionnaires. Each participant received \$20 for taking part in a group.

Focus groups are well suited to achieving the purposes of this evaluation for two main reasons:

- First, as a form of qualitative research, focus groups allow in-depth probing of the respondents' views in their own terms, rather than having the terms assumed or imposed on them. While these benefits apply to any group, this open-ended approach is particularly appropriate to groups "whose assumptions may differ from those of the mainstream culture, and who, therefore, have a particular need to speak, and be heard, 'in their own voices'" (Berkowitz, 1996: 54). Because of their distinctive status as citizens living in a United States commonwealth, residents of Puerto Rico may well have a perspective on Census 2000 that is distinct from that of household heads in the mainland United States.
- Second, focus groups bring together a small group of persons with certain common characteristics, making them particularly suitable for discussing a given topic. Focus groups differ from intensive interviews and other types of group interviews in their emphasis on interaction and interchange within the group. "What emerges from a focus group session is a group-generated response—presumably something different than the sum of what participants would have said if each had been interviewed separately" (Berkowitz: 60). The topic of this evaluation—reasons for not responding to Census 2000 by mail—is very suitable for group discussion.

2.1 Developing a survey and protocol

We developed English and Spanish versions of two instruments: 1) a brief survey, used to screen for potential participants and 2) a protocol, used in conducting the focus groups. In addition, we designed an observation and summary form for describing the context and dynamics of the focus group and for summarizing the main themes of the discussion.

2.1.1 Survey to identify focus group participants

being interviewed, greater alienation from and distrust of government, and more organized attempts to protest the census.

³ Although we originally intended to conduct focus groups in 12 sites, we were unable to carry out the groups as planned in three sites. The reasons are discussed in section 3, Limits.

The screener survey identified people who met our eligibility criteria and were willing and able to participate in the focus groups. It also collected basic demographic data about these people to use in selecting a balanced mix of focus group participants. Copies of both the survey's English and Spanish versions appear in Appendix A.

After an introduction explaining the purpose of the study, the survey asked the individuals if they had mailed back their Census 2000 questionnaires. Those reasonably certain they hadn't returned the Census 2000 questionnaire by mail were deemed eligible to continue. They were asked a few questions about themselves (length of time in residence, household size, education, occupation, and whether they received the long form or short form) and were requested to complete a brief checklist of reasons they had not returned their census questionnaire by mail. The final section of the survey provided further information about the focus groups, asked if the respondent was willing to participate, and collected contact information from those indicating they were interested in taking part.

2.1.2 Protocol for guiding focus group discussions

The focus group protocol helped guide focus group discussions. It asked a series of open-ended questions about reasons for not responding to Census 2000 by mail. The questions built on one another chronologically and thematically:

- The first three questions asked participants to think back several months to the time when they first heard about Census 2000 and received the forms. Question I focused on participants' recollections of, and reactions to, the procedures followed in distributing the Census 2000 advance letters and questionnaires. This was an icebreaker, also important in gauging reactions to the procedural changes that occurred between the 1990 and 2000 censuses. Question II asked participants to discuss the social contexts surrounding, and sources of information about, Census 2000 before receiving the forms and afterwards. Question III probed how far in the process the participants had gone before not mailing back their questionnaires.
- Those three questions led up to Question IV, the evaluation's focal question: "All in all, what would you say is the single most important reason you did not respond to Census 2000 (by mail)?" By now, participants had ample opportunity to refresh their memories and focus their thoughts on the subject. Finally, Question V asked participants to reflect on what might have been done differently to result in their completing and mailing back their Census 2000 questionnaires.

The protocol helped facilitators to guide discussions and cover all relevant areas. Recognizing that the discussion would almost certainly flow differently in different groups, the protocol wasn't meant to be followed rigidly. Facilitators had room to rearrange the order of the questions, reformulate questions, or forego asking a question if the participants had already discussed the issue in enough depth. The important point was to cover the full range of issues related to the central topic. Spanish and English versions of the protocol appear in Appendix B.

2.1.3 Focus group observation and summary form

The focus group observation and summary form served two main purposes:

- First, it provided the analyst important contextual data about each focus group session that couldn't be obtained from just listening to the tape or reading the transcript. The form, filled out by an observer during the session, focused on collecting information about the physical setting and about observed verbal and non-verbal behaviors (patterns of exchange, body language, facial expressions, tone of voice) among participants. Such information, absent from a verbatim transcript, can be crucial for interpreting the verbal statements.
- Second, in a section designed to be completed after their post-session debriefing, data-collection team members could summarize major themes that seemed to emerge and any methodological or procedural lessons learned. Thoughtful completion of this part of the form allowed the teams some input into the initial analysis of the data. It also provided a useful way to refine methods and procedures during the nearly 3 months of data collection.

A copy of this observation and summary form appears in Appendix C.

2.2 Training data collectors

Before data collection began, senior and junior data collectors attended a comprehensive one-day training session in San Juan led by Dr. Susan Berkowitz and Mr. Mervin Ruiz of Westat. The trainers summarized the objectives of the study and went over all data collection and reporting forms and procedures. Dr. Berkowitz provided an overview of focus group research and facilitation techniques. The whole group reviewed the Spanish versions of the screener survey and focus group protocol in detail and recommended minor changes. Data collection teams were formed and initial site assignments made.

Mr. Ruiz stayed in Puerto Rico for 2 weeks after the training to provide logistical and methodological support in getting the teams started on their first assignments.

2.3 Collecting the data

Data collection had three main components: 1) selecting sites and creating maps, 2) identifying and recruiting focus group participants, and 3) conducting the focus groups. Each component is discussed below.

2.3.1 Selecting sites and creating maps

Selecting the sites for the focus groups occurred in several steps:

- Using a map that indicated response rates for all municipalities (municipios) in Puerto Rico, we first identified 12 sites across the Island that met two tests: 1) below-average

mailback response rates for Census 2000 (under 50 percent) and 2) a range of geographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Within the constraints of choosing sites with low response rates, we selected urban coastal as well as rural mountainous interior sites in the San Juan area and the western, southern, eastern and northwestern parts of the Island.

- These selections were then sent to Dr. Walter Diaz at the Center for Applied Social Research at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez. Working with 1990 census data, Dr. Diaz used Geographic Information Systems (GIS) software to produce maps of the specified census tracts. In a few cases, he was unable to create maps for the originally selected sites and chose alternate census tracts that met the same criteria in geographic proximity to the original sites. The maps produced for each tract showed the boundaries of the tract and gave coordinates for landmarks and other information (such as street names). These oriented field researchers who canvassed areas to recruit focus group participants.

Over all, the maps provided at least a rough guide for the recruitment process. In a few cases, though, the information on the maps was outdated or inaccurate—not surprising given that the data were 10 years old. For example, in one metropolitan San Juan site, a major roadway had been constructed and a mass transit system extended into the tract in recent years. The result was a decline in the portion of the tract including residential neighborhoods, as a well as a pronounced physical division between the remaining residential areas. Initial recruitment efforts suggested that it would be extremely laborious and time consuming to continue in this site, so we replaced it with another tract meeting similar criteria.

Figure 1 presents a map of Puerto Rico showing the 12 municipios with tracts that were finally selected. The map also indicates which of the sites were in the original pool, which were replacements, which were completed, and which were not.

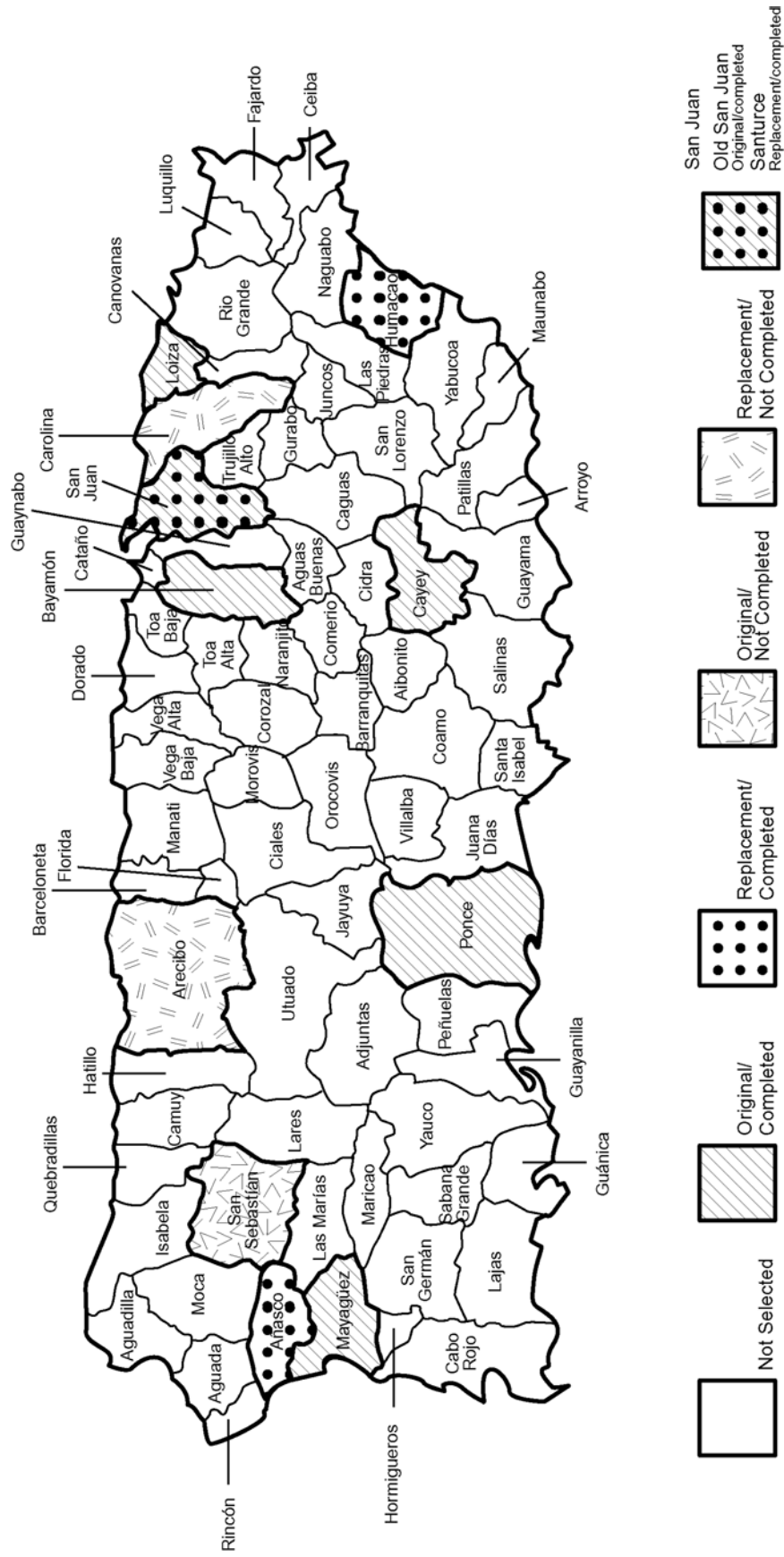
2.3.2 Identifying and recruiting focus group participants

The next major challenge was to find persons in the selected tracts who met the eligibility criteria and were willing to participate in the focus groups. In each tract, researchers sought to obtain the names and contact information for 10-15 such individuals, with the goal of getting five or six who would come to the focus group at the appointed time and place. The primary criterion was that the individual be a head of a household (the person who assumed responsibility for filling out the questionnaire) who hadn't returned the questionnaire by mail. Also eligible to participate were household heads who had later filled out their questionnaires with the help of an enumerator. In fact, at least half of the participants did fall into this category.

With no names or address lists to work from, our approach was to canvass residential portions of the designated sites door to door to screen for persons who met the criteria for participation. Researchers administered the screener survey to as many willing persons as they could find at home in the designated areas. However, this was rarely an easy process, for several reasons:

- Even with the maps, it often took a lot of time to physically locate and delineate the areas to canvass. For example, in some places, both rural and urban, there were no street signs

Figure 1. Nonresponse focus group sites



or street names, or residents did not recognize the names as given on the map. In several of the more urban tracts, commercial and governmental buildings rather than residences occupied much of the area.

- Gaining physical access to households was a problem in wealthier urban neighborhoods, where many residents live in high-security, gated buildings. At the opposite end of the economic spectrum, some of the poor neighborhoods posed potential dangers to the researchers. In these areas, the researchers always worked in teams and made a point of leaving well before nightfall.
- Even though all the census tracts had lower-than-average mailback response rates, researchers had a difficult time finding the requisite number of persons who identified themselves as not having returned the questionnaire by mail. In some places, as many as 100 households had to be approached to obtain 5 or 6 prospective participants.⁴

The result of these difficulties was that recruitment of participants took more time and required more visits to the sites than we had originally estimated. Also, since the pool of eligible and willing participants was quite small in most communities, we could rarely be very selective in choosing the mix of persons to invite to participate in the focus group.

2.3.3 Handling logistics

Besides recruiting eligible, willing participants, the teams also had to arrange for refreshments, find and schedule a suitable place to hold the focus group, and, in some cases, arrange for transportation and for babysitting for participants' children.

In many communities, getting a suitable place for a focus group was no mean feat. The ideal was a cool, comfortable, quiet place close to the participants' homes with as little extraneous noise as possible and a separate space for the children and babysitter. In some sites, the researchers were able to arrange to use schools or other public buildings that had most of these features.

In others, they had to improvise. For example, in one community, the only place available on the day all the participants could attend was the local McDonald's. (As it turned out, the situation worked out perfectly; the focus group was held in the party room, while the clown entertained the children on the adjoining playground.) Groups were held in a roofed, open structure on a beach and in a bandshell in a park. In another community, despite considerable effort, the researchers couldn't locate any suitable facility (one reason we decided to forego holding a focus group at that site).

The need to conduct some focus groups in less than ideal conditions may have affected the quality of the data (as addressed in section 3, Limits). But these community realities can help us

⁴ We can only speculate as to the reasons. People may have been reluctant to admit that they had not mailed back their questionnaires, or they may have answered that they had mailed it back to avoid having to respond to the survey.

to better understand the participants' responses. In any event, the data collectors deserve considerable credit for their creative improvisations in locating venues for these groups.

2.3.4 Conducting the focus groups

There were three primary data collection teams. The senior members of each team served as the facilitators of the focus group discussions. The junior members acted as observers and note takers. They also saw to the refreshments and made sure that the room was set up adequately and that tape recorders and microphones were working. In a few cases, when other arrangements fell through, junior members lent a hand with the babysitting.

The focus groups varied in size from four to ten participants; most had five or six. Ages varied widely, from 18 year-olds to persons in their late 60s and early 70s. Most participants were in their 30s and 40s. More than two-thirds of all participants were women; two of the groups consisted entirely of female participants. The sessions lasted about 60-90 minutes, not counting the time for breaks and refreshments.

The focus group sessions were tape-recorded. Team members met as soon as possible after the sessions to debrief on both content and process, collaborating to finalize the observation summary forms, which they then sent to Westat, along with the tapes.

2.4 Applying quality assurance procedures

Quality assurance procedures were applied to the design, implementation, analysis, and preparation of this report. The procedures encompassed methodology, specification of project procedures and software, computer system design and review, development of clerical and computer procedures, and data analysis and report writing. A description of the procedures used is provided in the "Census 2000 Evaluation Program Quality Assurance Process."

3. LIMITS

When considering the results of the evaluation, keep in mind several limits:

- These results aren't generalizable to any larger population. The results reported here derive from focus groups carried out with 41 household heads (28 women and 13 men) in nine purposively selected sites across Puerto Rico. While every effort was made to select sites representing a range of geographic and demographic characteristics, the results of these groups are only suggestive. They provide a useful jumping off point for additional thinking and further research.

- For different reasons,⁵ focus groups were not conducted as planned in three of the 12 selected sites. As seen on Figure 1, one of these sites was an interior community in the western part of the Island, another was on the northwestern coast, and the third was in the northeastern part of the Island. Thus, there was no apparent geographic or demographic "bias" toward excluding one type of site over another. Moreover, in all cases, we conducted at least one other group in a site with similar characteristics. Still, although the nine sites did present a good balance of geographic and demographic characteristics, it would have been preferable to hold focus groups in all 12 of the sites.
- At several of the sites, as mentioned above, the focus groups were conducted in less than ideal conditions. One group was held in an open-air bandshell in a public park, which made it difficult to screen out extraneous noise and to keep the participants' children from occasionally bursting into the session. In another group, conducted in an open-air structure on a beach during the early evening hours, liberal use of citronella candles couldn't keep the mosquitoes at bay. However, in both cases, group discussions were lively, so it is difficult to tell if the conditions really had much effect on the data quality.
- Transcripts couldn't be produced for two of the nine focus group sessions, because the tapes were unusable. The tape for Old San Juan was inaudible (due to poor placement of the microphone); the one for Loiza turned out to be blank (probably because the "record" button on the tape recorder had not been depressed). This meant that the analyst had to rely on the observation summary forms for data on these two sites. Because the summary forms were well done, the lack of verbatim transcripts didn't pose a major problem for the analysis. But it did make for a loss of richness and texture, including the ability to quote directly from participants in these two groups.

4. RESULTS

The reasons given by the focus group participants for not having mailed back their Census 2000 questionnaires ranged from the simple and mundane to the subtle and complex. They fall into four partially overlapping clusters, as described below.

⁵ In one site, data collectors could not locate a facility in which to hold the focus group, and tried, unsuccessfully, to schedule individual interviews with the four eligible persons they had identified through recruitment. In another largely non-residential tract, where the recruitment process began very late, it rapidly became clear that much more time than was available would be required to identify the requisite number of potential participants. In the third site, where seven of the eight invitees had assured the data collectors they were willing and able to participate, only two people showed up for the focus group at the appointed time and place. In this very poor community, where few are familiar with social research, the invitees may not have believed the study was for real. While waiting for the others to show, one of the two women who did come was overheard saying to her grandson, "See, I told you this was not Candid Camera." Also, although in walking distance from their homes, participants may not have felt that the library where the group was scheduled to take place was a hospitable setting. While everyone was waiting, the librarian made several disparaging comments about the illiteracy and "ignorance" of the people from the neighborhood, two of whom were there to hear it.

4.1 Motivational and process-related reasons for mail nonresponse

4.1.1 Lack of clarity about the purpose of the census

A range of participants in nearly all the communities and demographic groups said they weren't highly motivated to respond to the questionnaire because they didn't really understand or sympathize with what they took to be the ultimate purpose of the census.

After being told he had to fill out the questionnaire, one participant in an interior community asked, "But why should I fill that out?" When he didn't get a satisfactory response, he put it away and forgot about it. Another participant in the same group questioned the reasons the government needs to know who lives in his household. After being told that the purpose was to find out how many people live in Puerto Rico, he told his wife that she could fill it out, but he "was not interested" because he didn't see the point. "Why are they interested in knowing how many we are?"

A participant in a working-class urban community commented, "They should have done a better job explaining the mission of the census and what they expect to obtain with the census." Others in the same group echoed this sentiment, suggesting that the advertising campaign had made a big point of emphasizing the importance of returning the questionnaire, but had done little to explain why. One man in this group said that the intensity of the advertising surrounding the census had made the "census people" seem "desperate" to him, and so had aroused his suspicions about the census's true purpose.

A participant in an interior community felt that the census should have begun an aggressive advertising campaign well before 1999, to explain "what is the census and what it will be used for." In his view, a lot of people were confused. They thought the census was like the Internal Revenue Service, "for the purpose of making monetary contributions," and would have been reassured to know that "it was only to find out how many people there are." Indeed, participants in several of the groups were confused in just this way.

A female participant in another interior community summed it up as follows:

"Ten years ago, the census was done house to house and that gave us confidence because we were given the whole explanation about the objective of the census and what to expect. But this year the census was very different. And when one receives a long questionnaire at the gate of your home, you become intimidated by it."

Participants in wealthier neighborhoods agreed on the importance of educating the public about the census's mission: the "first thing that should appear on the census cover is the mission of the census—its main objective." However, in an interesting twist, in both groups conducted with well-educated middle class participants, several people also took issue with advertising that had presented the main motivation for completing the questionnaire in terms of gaining federal help.

One man in a well-to-do San Juan neighborhood was offended by this appeal as being too "commercial" and too mercenary. He believed it was more appropriate to stress the government's need for good demographic information. A participant in another major metropolitan site was similarly affronted by the idea that he should fill out the census questionnaire to gain financial help:

"Somewhere it says that this can help Puerto Rico. That is an insult to me. I do not want any help. I want jobs. I work hard and for that reason I went to school."

These participants' views are part of a larger set of misperceptions of advertising messages that appealed to people to complete their Census 2000 questionnaires so their communities would receive resources in proportion to their numbers. As reported above, some people apparently understood any reference to "funds" or "help" as code words for taxation. One woman, for example, was "surprised that this had nothing to do with taxes." Another participant in an interior community was told by her neighbor that it (the census) "was to pay monetary contributions." This impression was reinforced by what was perceived as intimidating language stating it "was mandatory" to fill out the questionnaire.

Others feared that the "wrong" response on the questionnaire could mean the loss of government assistance, such as Social Security. As shown in section 4.3 (Cultural and political attitudinal factors), fears of loss of benefits were closely tied to concerns that the data wouldn't remain confidential, as well as mistrust of the government. Here the larger point is that for many in these focus groups, advertising appeals about the census's mission in fairly allocating resources fell wide of the mark, even frightening some people away from responding.

4.1.2 Confusion over distribution of forms and the role of enumerators

A fair number of participants, especially in the more rural communities, said they were confused by how the Census 2000 questionnaires were distributed and didn't understand just what to do once they received the form.

Some claimed they never received an advance letter. A few said that an advance letter had reached them but no questionnaire had followed. A few said they didn't know they were supposed to mail back the questionnaire and believed that an enumerator was supposed to come by and pick it up. Some participants in interior communities said they didn't know if they would need to use stamps in mailing back the questionnaire.

Several participants in different groups complained about what they saw as the inconsistent and unpredictable manner in which the questionnaires were distributed. They perceived that some households got questionnaires by mail, while others had them dropped off at the gate, and still others received them in person.⁶ Why the difference? In some cases, this critique extended to the issue of why some households got the short form, while others received the long form. The process appeared capricious and random to them.

⁶ No Spanish questionnaires were mailed out. However, some participants thought they had been.

Many participants were perplexed by the role of the enumerator in Census 2000, especially in comparison to the enumerator's role in 1990. Was the enumerator supposed to help fill out the forms or merely pick up the completed forms? If an enumerator was going to stop by anyway, what was the sense in mailing back the questionnaires?

"I was told that if I did not mail it [the questionnaire], someone would come to visit me. That visit never happened, or if they came, they did not find me. And I was always thinking that I had to mail it, but never did." (Male participant, interior community)

"In my case, I had it (the questionnaire) for 2 weeks and did not know how to fill it out... It just happens that a census lady came by and she told me she was not supposed to help in filling out the form but that she would help me." (Female participant, another interior community)

"I ended up not mailing mine back because the interviewer came by and filled it out with me." (Male respondent, poor coastal community)

A few participants felt it was only right that the enumerators help them fill out their questionnaires, since the Census Bureau was paying them to do it. One woman in a working class urban community, who had herself been passed over for a job with the census, told the enumerator, "Look, you are working for the census in my sector. Since you are going to get paid and I am not, come to my house and help me fill mine out."⁷

Participants in different communities complained about having received multiple visits from different enumerators, each of whom asked them to fill out the questionnaire all over again. One woman in a working-class coastal community filled out the Census 2000 questionnaire three different times with three different enumerators. A participant from a coastal metropolitan area noted having had to complete the questionnaire twice, after a second enumerator told him the first questionnaire had been lost. "If this is confidential," he asked, "how was the census form lost--the one I filled out the first time?" A woman in metropolitan San Juan told of having finally put her foot down on the third visit from an enumerator.⁸

"Someone brought it (the questionnaire) to my house. The man who gave it to me said that someone would come later to explain to me how to fill it out, but no one ever came to my home. Finally, someone did come by and helped me fill it out, and later, on two different occasions, two other people came by my house to help

⁷ Three participants in three different groups claimed to have scored well on the test but were not hired as enumerators. This perceived injustice had contributed to their reasons for not mailing back the questionnaires. Others reported friends or relatives having had similar experiences. Several participants, and not just those who were themselves passed over, felt the hiring process had been conducted unfairly, which colored their perceptions of the census negatively.

⁸ The Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation Survey was being conducted at the same time and may have caused confusion.

me fill it out. I sat down a second time to fill it out because they did not seem to understand or care that I had already done the same interview with a previous person. But the third time an interviewer came to my house with the same mission, I told him I would not fill it out any more times."

4.2 Practical and logistical reasons for mail nonresponse

Practical and logistical considerations form another cluster of reasons given by participants for not having returned the questionnaires by mail. While many of these might seem quite prosaic, in some cases they are linked to the larger issue of whether the participants understood and sympathized with the census's mission, as discussed in section 4.1.1, Lack of clarity about the purpose of the census.

4.2.1 Lack of time

Many participants said they were simply too busy, their lives too harried, to take the time to fill out the questionnaire and return it by mail. While this view was expressed across communities and demographic groups, it was particularly salient to working mothers, whether single or married. It appeared that most of the husbands in these families delegated the responsibility for filling out the questionnaire to their wives.

Said one young mother of Dominican descent in a poor, urban neighborhood, who works cleaning houses: "I opened it and filled out the first page and since I had so much to do around the house and the children, I threw it away because I was so busy." A young married woman in an interior community also talked about her husband's role in the process: "I received it by mail. My husband would say we had to fill it out and I would say, 'As soon as I have the time.' But I work and have children and I knew I had to do this, but could not find the time." She did end up filling out the questionnaire but only because an enumerator came by and helped her complete it in only a few minutes.

Another busy mother in an urban coastal community insisted that in the little free time that she has, "I want to sit down and watch the soap operas. I am not going to miss the soap operas because I have to fill out the census. Because in reality, I deserve some time for myself."

A working mother in an urban community linked her answer about not having the time to properly answer the questions to a preference for door-to-door data collection by an enumerator:

"Will the people who receive this census know how to interpret the questions, like those of us who work and do not have time to read so much paperwork? I leave for work when it is dark and return at dark, every day. I have two children. It is easier for an interviewer to go to each home and at that moment collect the census data."

4.2.2 Problems with mailing the form

For some participants, especially residents of interior communities, getting to the post office to mail the forms was just too hard, particularly when they assumed they could count on the enumerator as a fallback. Said one participant in an interior community, "I have only one free day a week. There is only one car at home. There is no mailbox nearby so that I can walk to it." Another participant in an interior community judged the idea of asking respondents to mail the questionnaire "a disaster." Many people, he claimed, especially the elderly, are unable to go out in search of a post office, and may not want to rely on other people to do them the favor of mailing things for them.

Along related lines, participants in another interior community suggested that the mail system doesn't work as well as the door-to-door approach because "people are not used to the mail as much." A participant from an urban community who had filled out the questionnaire in its entirety, but never mailed it, held the postal system at least partly to blame. She had lived in New York City for many years and was very surprised that in Puerto Rico the letter carrier wouldn't take her outgoing mail, so that she had to go to the post office herself.

4.3 Cultural and political attitudinal factors for mail nonresponse

4.3.1 Fear of lack of confidentiality and attendant consequences

In many focus groups, participants questioned whether the census data are truly confidential. For most, this was linked to fear that government assistance or scholarships might be lost, that punitive measures might be taken, or that other negative consequences might ensue for them and their families.

A participant in a poor interior community noted, "Even though confidentiality is guaranteed, one is afraid that this may not be true," adding that he hadn't filled out the questionnaire for fear of being asked to pay more money (presumably, in taxes). Participants in two urban, working class neighborhoods echoed these views. One man reasoned that the sheer number of questions (on the long form) made it unlikely that the answers were really kept confidential.

Several participants felt that detailed questions on their finances were unwarranted, since they didn't receive government assistance. They believed, in the words of one participant, that the census was "really after other things." Like several others, one woman could see only one possible ulterior motive behind all the income-related questions:

"I said, if this is a population census, why do they want to know how much money I spend, how much I earn? I thought that what they really wanted to know was if I receive government benefits if I should not, because I was working."

Another man worried that filling out the questionnaire might jeopardize his family's precarious financial situation:

"We who work hard, do not receive any kind of government help because, by a small amount, I earn too much. We are five at home. I don't have money in the bank. My wife does not work. I got coupons because my company reduced personnel where I work and, thank God, that was all they could give me. But then, if I fill out this form, I won't qualify because if they see what I supposedly earn in a year, they will say this person can survive on what he earns, which is a lie because in this country we cannot survive on what we earn."

A woman in the same group was concerned that her filling out the census questionnaire would affect her mother's ability to vote, since the enumerator had removed her mother from the household count. A man reported his brother had been told if he didn't complete the questionnaire, he would lose his government scholarship.

One man summarized the views of many of his co-participants as follows:

"I think there was a problem of confidentiality. The fear that any information given out would fall right into the hands of the Puerto Rican government, which, in turn, would affect employment search, financial help, scholarships, schools, and many other things. Because one does not know how far this information can reach and in what hands it may end up. [There is] a lot of lack of trust."

4.3.2 Mistrust of government and politicians

Like the man quoted just above, many participants expressed a deep-seated mistrust of the government. As one participant from an interior community said, "Those who have the most money in this country are the politicians, and some politicians don't even pay what they owe. And we, who are poor, feel afraid. I am in doubt, and because of the doubts I had, I was afraid to fill out the form."

Quite a few participants believed that any funds that would come to the Island through the census would only be used by the politicians to feather their own nests. In the end, the people who really need the help would not get it anyway. One teacher in a middle-class urban community put it this way: "I am going to say the truth on why people did not take the census seriously. Say, for example, the mothers of the students in my school. They thought that this census would serve to ask for more federal funds and then rob those." Said another participant in the same group, "one hears stories that if we fill out a questionnaire, then we may be denied certain federal help such as Section 8. It is like a campaign of terror for us."

Participants in a middle-class urban neighborhood extended this "guilt by association" argument even further. Several suggested that it was unfortunate that the census was held in an election year, since the mayor of their town had come out very strongly against the census. Moreover, as far as they were concerned, the advertising for the census seemed too much like political campaign hype. Remarked one participant: "It all seemed so political." Commented another:

"The publicity given to the census, about filling it out, was too much, especially on TV. Then they also gave out free promotional items in various places: hats,

coolers, pens, and so on, at the park. It sounded so political to me. So much publicity scared me. The other times in the past, the census had not been given so much noise. So much publicity of this kind actually scared the population, because we thought it was a political festival. This confused us and made us suspicious, too."

4.3.3 Cultural preference for a personal approach

Across the board, participants expressed a strong preference for the more personal, door-to-door approach taken in the 1990 census. They found the idea of dropping off the questionnaire at the gate too impersonal and bureaucratic for their taste. Indeed, more than half of the participants did end up responding through an enumerator during the nonresponse followup program.

To some participants, the impersonality seemed to be saying that the census couldn't really be very important. As one participant in a middle-class urban community noted:

"The fact that the census form was just left there somewhere outside our home for us to pick up did not give the census its importance or even credibility. If a person would have given it to us and would explain its mission, one would sit down and fill it out quickly and painlessly."

Participants in several groups suggested if they had to invest the time in answering census questions, they would rather do so in the context of a friendly conversation. Some of them used the recruitment process for the focus groups as an example of the more personal approach they preferred. Said one woman,

"We are real close. We are like that. Those relationships with people like when you [the recruiters] came. See, we talk to the whole world. And if anyone goes by, we say hello as if we had known them for 10 years. We are accustomed to people coming to our houses and inviting them in and saying well sit right here and we'll fill it out and we'll eat something."

Her neighbor added, "Like a good Puerto Rican—do you want some coffee, do you want a refreshment, do you want a juice? We are used to something more personal," added another participant. "Americans are more distant, more independent, we [Puerto Ricans] are not like that."

Participants in several groups emphasized that people in Puerto Rico would be more likely to respond to an interviewer in human terms, which would commit them to filling out the form. As one woman in an interior community put it, "I think that when an interviewer visits each home to collect the information, it commits the respondent to answer, no matter what kinds of questions are being asked." Moreover, suggested a man in another group, people tend to feel sympathy for an interviewer working in the hot sun. "Here we would think, poor thing, this poor boy, slaving away." A woman added that, as a mother, she would empathize with a young person going door to door and would be inclined to leave whatever she was doing to help that person. In effect, responding to the questionnaire would become a social interaction rather than an impersonal transaction.

A few participants extended this cultural argument to the entire idea of collecting quantitative information. They suggested that Puerto Ricans, "by nature," aren't as precise or as oriented towards statistics and record-keeping as Americans. Thus, they don't think about the world in the terms in which the census asks the questions. Other culturally based reasons for not responding to the questionnaire are discussed in section 4.4, Reasons related to questionnaire content and design.

4.4 Reasons related to questionnaire content and design for mail nonresponse

4.4.1 Objections to the race/ethnicity questions

When the issue came up, as it did spontaneously in four of the coastal, urban sites, the race/ethnicity questions elicited the strongest negative reactions from participants of any of the questions in the Census 2000 questionnaire. One man told the recruiters his primary reason for agreeing to participate in the study was that he felt so strongly on the topic that he wanted to have an outlet for his views. As seen below, several participants indicated that they stopped filling out their questionnaire once they came to the question on race.

Two related themes emerged in participants' often strongly felt responses: that the questions were "discriminatory" and divisive to the Puerto Rican population, and that the questions and response categories as provided were inappropriate to the Creole or "mixed" realities of Puerto Rican society.

Said one participant in a middle-class urban community:

"I have been working in Human Resources for about 26 years. I have received training on equal employment. I understand that about the races. When I saw the census form and read the race question I thought I am not White or Black or anything else because I am Hispanic and so I was upset and decided not to fill it out. That question is against all that I have learned about the equality law. I felt offended and upset when I read all the response categories for the race question because none of those were mine."

A man in a working-class coastal town felt that "with this race question, the census people were discriminating against us and that made me feel bad." He told his wife: "What is wrong with these people? Who do they think they are?" Another man in the same focus group reported, like several others, that he had stopped filling out the questionnaire once he came to the race question because:

"I realized we were being discriminated against by race. I did not find an alternative answer for my race because we are neither African Blacks nor American Indians. The census did not have the optional answer of 'Puerto Rican,' our race. The question upset me because I thought why do we have to be divided as a race, if we have all kinds of races living here: Chinese, Arabs, Dominicans, Cubans. It occurred to me that this question was somewhat racist and I did not

want to fill out the form and so I did not."

One participant in another coastal community said he had anticipated that many of the questions wouldn't be culturally appropriate once he found out that the same questionnaire was being used in Puerto Rico as in the United States. The same questions were bound not to work in both places, he felt, because "we are an Island and a compact society." Sure enough, when he saw the race question, he "banged" his head and said, "Where do I go? I'm not Black, but I'm not White—questions that were not in tune with our society."

Several participants pointed to the complexities of responding to the race question for members of their families. One man, claiming to be neither White, Black, Indian, nor "other," mentioned that he has a blond, blue-eyed sister who classified herself as "White" on her questionnaire. A female participant reported to the enumerator that she was unable to complete the questionnaire because her son is of mixed race, and she didn't know in which category he belonged. In one group, a lively discussion ensued over how they should classify themselves: White? Black? Latino? Indian? Other? The only category that made sense to most—Puerto Rican—wasn't there.

One male participant saw the race question as a negation of Puerto Rican culture by those who had created the questionnaire:

"There was no option for Latino, or Puerto Rican, or Hispanic. This badly designed question demonstrated that our culture does not exist. I felt offended and said I would not fill it out. My wife told me I had to fill it out, according to law. I said let them come and get me and have them put me in jail!"

4.4.2 Problems with other questions

The two other types of questions that elicited the most comments from participants were the income and other financial questions, and the marital status and household composition questions.

Some participants felt questions about their income and financial resources were too personal—"an invasion of privacy"—as well as very complicated and "tricky" to answer. People were scared to answer questions about income, especially when they thought their answers could be linked with their social security numbers. As expressed above, some worried that the information would not be kept confidential and therefore problems might arise, for example, if inconsistencies were discovered between what they reported in one place and another.

Said one participant in an interior community:

"I do not like to answer private questions because I am afraid. For example, questions like how many live in my household and who they are, what is my income. I don't like to say how much I pay for my home, and so on. Sometimes one does not fill out the tax forms accurately and maybe the government could find out through this form."

A participant in an urban, coastal community expressed similar concerns that disparities in reporting income to different sources, even if innocent or unintentional, could create problems, "especially when it is about something federal."

Another participant in an interior community didn't mail back the questionnaire because of difficulties answering the question on income. He had stopped working 6 months into the year, and didn't know how to report that. He received no helpful guidance when he called the 800 number but did finally clarify the situation with the help of the enumerator who came to his home. Like so many others, he used his experience in this regard as an argument for an in-person door-to-door approach to collecting census information.

A number of participants who were living with partners to whom they were not officially married didn't know how to respond to questions about their marital status. For example, one older woman who had been widowed for quite some time, and now lived with a partner whom she considered a de facto husband, was uncertain of how to answer. "I live with this man for many years now. I do not see myself as a widow, but I do not consider myself married either." The same was true of younger persons in live-in or common-law relationships.

Household composition questions were seen as tricky, too, particularly where household boundaries were fluid. Also, a few participants had a hard time separating cultural notions of "family" (in some cases, extended family) from questions that asked about household composition. One woman, for example, was unsure of whether to include her brothers who lived in the United States. Like some others, she was clearly thinking of family composition rather than following a strict definition of common household residence.

4.4.3 Problems with length of the questionnaire, question complexity, wording, format

Most participants who had received the long form complained that it was way too long. Did it really need to be 39 pages? Several felt that the long form wasn't really a census at all but a disguised socioeconomic study that really should have been separate. The number and type of questions fed their suspicions that the government actually had an ulterior purpose in mind. Said one man from an urban, coastal community:

"If this is confidential and also for population reasons, it was not necessary to ask for the name and social security. [Note: The Census 2000 questionnaire didn't ask for a respondent's Social Security number.] Why ask questions such as homes that we own and so on. The long version of the census did not have to be 39 pages long. Maybe this was not only a population effort but had other objectives of which we are not aware. Maybe they wanted to know if people answer the census questions in the same way they answer other government agency questions."

A number of participants complained that the questions were too complex and the language hard to understand. In some cases, the basic issue was literacy. Some people with little formal education admitted that they simply couldn't read the questions well enough to really understand what they were being asked. They waited for the enumerators to come and help them out. One

woman in a poor interior community had called a teacher to help her, but the teacher couldn't answer the questions and instead put her in touch with the census office. Another woman in the same community reported that her mother had had a hard time filling out the questionnaire because she couldn't understand it.

Participants in the poorer communities in the interior recognized that many of their neighbors, friends, and family lacked the basic literacy skills to read and respond to the questions on their own. "Here in Puerto Rico there are many people who neither read nor write. How are they going to be able to fill out a form like this?" Another participant reported that "the brothers of my church preach beautifully, but they do not read or write. You see, in the rural areas, various things and lack of transportation make it difficult for people to go to school."

Some of the older participants in urban neighborhoods also had little formal schooling, such as one woman who had gone only up to the first grade in school: "I tried to read the form," she said, "I did not understand anything!" Some people expressed similar concerns for older residents of their communities. Said one younger person in an urban, working-class community: "If we, who are educated, are having problems answering, imagine how hard it is for the elderly?" But it wasn't just participants in rural communities and the elderly who reported difficulties understanding and completing the questionnaires. One woman in an urban neighborhood felt the language was sometimes confusing even for professionals.

Several of those who received the long form protested not only the length, but also what they regarded as the onerous requirements of collecting data to answer the financial questions. Said one participant: "It was even necessary to look for old receipts and bills to answer the census!" Several objected to the format of the questionnaire, especially the need to answer the same set of questions for each individual in the household. They complained that it was too cumbersome to keep flipping back and forth, and hard to keep track of who was Person 1 and who was Person 2, and so on. Several found the questions repetitive; one woman noted that several of the questions at the beginning and the end of the questionnaire seemed identical to her. One participant from a middle-class neighborhood judged the layout aesthetically unattractive.

One interesting theme that arose for those who found the questionnaire hard to complete was fear of making a mistake. Several of these participants said that they realized the importance of providing accurate information, and had thus decided not to fill out the questionnaire at all rather than risk making a mistake through interpreting a question incorrectly. One woman in an urban community who eventually filled out the questionnaire with the help of an enumerator, said this:

"When I saw so many pages and so much wording, I thought I would not be able to do a good job when filling it out, and I like to do things right. I was conscious that this was very important, but I did not want to do a bad job at filling it out."

Similarly, a participant in an interior community had kept questionnaire for 2 weeks and done nothing with it. She said. "I did not want to fill it out alone because I did not know if I was going to do a good job. I did not want to live with that worry." She finally prevailed upon the enumerator to help her.

Others stopped filling out the questionnaire once they realized they had either made a mistake or

had gotten the form dirty. One woman left off when she couldn't find a bottle of correction fluid to correct her error. Another participant remarked, "I made a mistake and I didn't send it, because I am not going to send it with a mark through or they'll talk about me afterwards." Apparently, there is a strong value placed on handing in forms that are neat and clean. As one participant in an urban community noted, if a child spills something on a school project, his mother will say: "That is no good. Your teacher will say you're a pig."

Most of those who had made mistakes or soiled their questionnaires made no active efforts to seek out another copy. One woman got a new form when she just happened to notice a stack of clean questionnaires for the taking while shopping at Wal-Mart.

4.5 Summary

The above discussion encompasses all but the most idiosyncratic reasons given by participants for not having returned their Census 2000 questionnaires by mail. The main reasons, grouped into four clusters, can be summarized as follows:

- Motivational and process-related reasons. Lack of clarity about the purpose of the census, including thinking it had to do with taxation or assignment of welfare benefits; confusion about the process by which the questionnaires were distributed and requirements for responding; and uncertainty about the "correct" role of the enumerator.
- Practical and logistical reasons. Lack of time and difficulties of mailing the questionnaire.
- Cultural and political attitudinal reasons. Fear that the information wouldn't be kept confidential, which might result in loss of government benefits; belief that the money would end up only lining the pockets of the politicians; and association of the census with a political campaign, reinforcing suspicions as to its "true purpose." Also, a strong cultural preference for a more personal approach to distributing, administering, and returning the questionnaires.
- Reasons related to questionnaire content and design. Very strong objections to the race/ethnicity questions as divisive and insensitive to the "mixed" realities of Puerto Rican society. Objections to other questions, especially those about income and finances, as intrusive as well as difficult and demanding to answer. Complaints that the long form asked too many questions, many of which seemed "out of scope" for a census, and that the questionnaire was difficult to read and understand, especially for those with little or no formal education.

Although the responses were reasonably well spread, there were some interesting differences across communities and groups for not responding by mail. Participants in interior communities were more likely to give logistic reasons, especially difficulties with mailing back the form, as well as problems reading and understanding the questionnaire, and confusion about the role of the enumerator. By contrast, while participants in all groups expressed concerns that some questions were too private, the race/ethnicity questions emerged as a major issue only in the

more urban coastal communities. In those communities, the race/ethnicity questions inspired the most strenuous negative reactions of any questions on the Census 2000 questionnaire.

The twin themes of mistrust of government and politicians and suspicions of an "ulterior motive" for the census ran through virtually all the groups. However, these sentiments were framed differently depending on the group. In working class and poorer communities, both coastal and interior, concerns centered on losing government benefits or fears that the government was really checking up on whether they were receiving benefits for which they really didn't qualify. Participants in the two middle-class neighborhoods were more likely to express the suspicion that additional money received would only benefit corrupt politicians. Moreover, as seen, several people in these sites were affronted by the implication they would be motivated to reply to the census in order to gain government assistance.

Almost everyone had heard something about Census 2000 from television and radio ads, newspapers, schools, or from informal sources such as relatives, neighbors, and "brothers" or "sisters" in their churches. Most had also discussed some aspect of the process with someone else. Many participants indicated they had consulted with family members or neighbors while trying to complete their questionnaires, sometimes in an effort to reach a consensus as to what was being asked or how they should answer. For the vast majority of those who participated in the nine focus groups, then, this was a socially grounded process.

While agreeing that Census 2000 was better advertised than previous censuses, most participants believed the advertising wasn't very successful at communicating key messages. Several people seemed to remember bits and pieces of slogans or isolated phrases--such as "Don't leave your future blank"--without having gotten the overall message. As seen, some felt the advertising was "overkill" and too reminiscent of political campaigns. Others believed the ads placed undue emphasis on the importance of returning the questionnaires without educating the public as to the census's mission and purpose.

Several thought that a more educationally oriented advertising campaign should have been initiated sooner, to better prepare people for the changes in store and dispel some of the anxieties and misconceptions about the process. As one man said, echoing the sentiments of many of the participants from all types of communities:

"The census system should be more flexible. A lot of people do not know how to fill it out because of lack of education. This type of questionnaire is a threat to many people here in Puerto Rico. I do not know what I do not know. We need to be educated about the census for a long period of time before the actual census so that we understand the census's mission and how to fill it out."

Critiques of the ad campaign and the requirements of mailing back the questionnaire dovetailed with the participants' clear preference for the "old system" as conducted in 1990. Participants in all communities and across all demographic and economic groups expressed a strong, unqualified support for in-person data collection as the means of gathering the necessary information. Not

only is this approach more culturally appropriate, they felt, but it is also more cost effective and less subject to errors of interpretation that can occur when questionnaires are returned by mail.

Barring a return to in-person data collection, participants suggested setting up community-based help centers to aid those having difficulty answering the questions or needing special assistance in filling out their questionnaires, or establishing other community-based mechanisms for distributing and collecting the questionnaires.⁹

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus groups with household heads in nine communities across Puerto Rico revealed four interrelated clusters of reasons why they hadn't mailed back their Census 2000 questionnaires. Although not generalizable to the larger population of Puerto Rican household heads, these results may still have potential implications for changes that might be made to improve response rates in future censuses on the Island. They also suggest areas for further research and exploration. The recommendations presented below are thus intended as only suggestive; further research and exploration is necessary to put them on firmer footing.

5.1 Recommendations arising from reasons for mail nonresponse

The following recommendations grow from the four main clusters of reasons for mailback nonresponse.

5.1.1 Motivational and process-related reasons

- Provide more comprehensive information, in different forms, on the mission, purpose, and uses of the census. This information should be presented in a manner that will allay misplaced fears and directly address common misconceptions (such as that census information will be used for taxation purposes). Disseminate this information in different venues and through a variety of community channels (such as schools, church groups, neighborhood associations).
- Especially for those who do receive the long form, explain the rationale for having both a long form and a short form version of the questionnaire as well as the reasons for including the additional questions and need for the detailed information they request.
- Provide a comprehensive and clear description of the changed role of the enumerator in the data collection process. This should be disseminated, along with information on the mission and purpose of the census, before the enumerators drop off the questionnaires.
- Supply very clear, simple, step-by-step instructions on the procedures that the respondent

⁹ Several participants tried to get help by calling the 800 number. Some failed to get through despite repeated attempts, while others received what they felt were unsatisfactory responses. Although Puerto Rico had over 100 Questionnaire Assistance Centers, the participants apparently didn't know this.

should follow in completing and mailing back the questionnaire--including such seemingly minor details as whether postage is required. Apart from the 800 number, inform people of the locations and hours of operation of the Assistance Centers as well as the services provided there.

5.1.2 Practical and logistic reasons

- Although there is certainly no way to give people more time in their busy lives, improving motivation by providing a clearer understanding of the purpose and importance of the census, as suggested above, might give completing the census questionnaire higher priority among competing demands.
- In rural areas, where people have to travel substantial distances to reach a post office, it might help to establish specially designated drop-off points for the census questionnaires.

5.1.3 Cultural and political attitudinal reasons

- These are probably the hardest reasons to deal with directly, as they relate to broadly held views and attitudes. However, cultural and attitudinal barriers may also be addressed, to some extent, by better information. For example, if generalized suspicion of politicians makes people more inclined to doubt the confidentiality of their answers, these concerns might be directly addressed as factually incorrect. However, the tone as well as the content of any such communication will be important, because seeming to "protest too much" might make people more suspicious.
- Barring a return to the more personal door-to-door approach taken in 1990, any attempt to personalize the process would probably meet with a positive response.

5.1.4 Questionnaire design and content

- Conduct further research in Puerto Rico on views and perceptions of the Census 2000 questions on race and ethnicity, which drew such strong negative reactions from participants in more urban, coastal communities.¹⁰ Compare this to similar relevant research conducted stateside to try to establish commonalities and differences between the Puerto Rican case and others.
- Include Puerto Rico in any additional cognitive testing or efforts to field test different versions and formats of questions and questionnaires for future censuses.

¹⁰ Research of this type is currently being conducted as part of this task. Focus groups are being held in 12 communities across the Island with a diverse group of participants to explore their views and perceptions of Question 8 (on ethnicity) and Question 9 (on race).

5.2 Overarching recommendations

In addition to those presented above, we offer two additional, overarching recommendations:

- Use the results and recommendations from this study, as well as other supporting testing and research, to develop advertising appeals for census participation more attuned to the Puerto Rican population.
- Consider using the results of this study to create a close-ended survey to be administered to a probability sample of residents of the Island. The survey could seek the respondents' views of different approaches to data collection for the census, as well as their reactions to the content of any new materials or advertisements developed from the specific recommendations offered here.

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Appendix A-1

PUERTO RICO EVALUATION–ENGLISH VERSION

(Screener for Focus Group Participation)

Hello. My name is (-----) and I work for Westat, a research company located outside Washington, D.C. Westat is doing a study for the US Census Bureau to find out more about why people in Puerto Rico may not have returned their Census 2000 forms.

First, can I ask whether or not you mailed back your Census 2000 form--that would have been several months ago, in March or April sometime? *(If individual does not remember, facilitator will show copies of the form to jog their memory. If the individual says he/she returned the form or cannot remember, thank him/her for their time and proceed to the next dwelling. If is reasonably sure he/she did not answer, then continue).*

To start with, will you answer a few short questions for me? You can fill out this form yourself or I will be happy to take down the answers for you.

1) How long have you lived at this address? _____mos/yrs

2) How many people, including yourself, normally reside here? _____

3) How old are you?

- 1) 18-25
- 2) 26-35
- 3) 36-45
- 4) 46-55
- 5) 56-65
- 6) 66-75
- 7) 76-85
- 8) 85+

4) What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

- 1) no formal schooling
- 2) elementary school (6thth grade or less)
- 3) middle school (7th-9th grade)
- 4) some high school
- 5) high school graduate
- 6) some college
- 7) Associates degree
- 8) Bachelors degree
- 9) Postgraduate degree

5) What is your occupation? (*includes student, housewife, unemployed, occasionally employed*)

6) Do you remember which census form you received?

- 1) I received the long form
- 2) I received the short form
- 3) I'm not sure/Don't remember

7) Here are some reasons why someone might not have returned their census forms. Please check off all the reasons that apply to you:

- 1) I accidentally threw out the form
- 2) I forgot about or misplaced the form
- 3) The form was too long
- 4) I couldn't read the form
- 5) The instructions were confusing to follow
- 6) Some of the questions were too personal
- 7) Some of the questions were hard to understand
- 8) I did not want the government to know my business
- 9) I did not believe that the information would be kept confidential
- 10) I did not see what good it would do for me or my family
- 11) I was not sure how the information would be used
- 12) I was too busy with other things
- 13) Other (specify)

Thank you for responding to these questions. Would you be interested in participating in a group discussion with about six to eight other people to talk more about this subject? The other participants would also be persons from this area who did not respond to the census. It will be an open-ended discussion in which you will be able to express and share your views freely. The group will last about 2 hours and will be held somewhere close by. If you were to be invited to participate, you would also be paid \$20 and your transportation costs would be covered. Babysitting will also be provided if you would need to bring your children along, and food and drinks will be served.

Do you think you would want to participate (*If answers yes,*) Can I have **your name**, as well as an **address** and **telephone number** where I may reach you in the next few weeks? Also, what would be a good day of the week and time of the day or evening for you? (*Determine weekday or weekend, daytime or evening*). Thank you so much, and you may be hearing back from us very soon.

Appendix A-2

PUERTO RICO EVALUATION-SPANISH VERSION

Buenos días/tardes/noches. Mi nombre es (_____) y estoy trabajando para Westat, ésta es una compañía en el área de Washington D.C. que hace estudios para diferentes organizaciones y agencias de gobierno. En estos momentos, Westat está haciendo un estudio para el Censo con el propósito de conocer un poco más la opinión de las personas sobre el proceso de llenar y devolver los cuestionarios..

¿Déjeme preguntarle, envió usted por correo el cuestionario del Censo? ¿Recuerda si devolvió el formulario? Eso tuvo que haber sido en algún momento entre marzo y abril. *(En caso de no recordar, el facilitador puede mostrarle los cuestionarios por aquello de refrescarles la memoria. Si la persona dice que devolvió el cuestionario o no recuerda haberlo devuelto, déle entonces las gracias y pase a la próxima vivienda. Continúe con la encuesta si la persona esta razonablemente segura de que no lo devolvió).*

¿Podría hacerle algunas preguntas?

1. ¿Cuánto tiempo lleva viviendo en esta dirección/área? _____ años/meses
 2. ¿Cuántas personas, incluyéndose a usted, viven en la casa?
 3. ¿Cuántos años tiene?
 - 1) 18-25
 - 2) 26-35
 - 3) 36-45
 - 4) 46-55
 - 5) 56-65
 - 6) 66-75
 - 7) 76-85
 - 8) 85+
 4. ¿Cuál fue el nivel más alto que llegó en la escuela?
 - 1) Nunca fue a la escuela
 - 2) Escuela elemental (hasta el sexto grado)
 - 3) Escuela intermedia (del séptimo al noveno grado)
 - 4) Algunos años de escuela superior pero no terminó
 - 5) Se graduó de escuela superior
 - 6) Algunos cursos universitarios
 - 7) Grado Asociado
 - 8) Bachillerato
 - 9) Estudios Graduados
 5. ¿En qué trabaja usted? *(incluye categorías como estudiante, ama de casa, desempleado, empleado ocasionalmente o chiripas)*
-

6. Recuerda usted que tipo de cuestionario del censo recibio usted?
- 1) Recibí el cuestionario largo
 - 2) Recibí el cuestionario corto
 - 3) No estoy seguro(a)/No recuerdo
7. A continuación hay un listado de razones por las que una persona pudo haber decidido no devolver o enviar por correo el cuestionario del censo. Por favor, marque todas las razones que apliquen:
- 1) Accidentalmente boté el cuestionario
 - 2) Me olvidé o lo puse en algún sitio que no recuerdo
 - 3) El cuestionario era demasiado largo
 - 4) No podía leer el cuestionario
 - 5) Las instrucciones eran confusas
 - 6) Algunas preguntas eran muy personales
 - 7) Algunas preguntas eran difíciles de entender
 - 8) No quería que el gobierno supiera de mis asuntos
 - 9) No creí que la información fuera confidencial
 - 10) No sé que beneficios pueda tener para mí o mi familia
 - 11) No estaba seguro de como usarían la información
 - 12) Estaba demasiado ocupado
 - 13) Otra (especifique): _____

Muchísimas gracias por contestar estas preguntas. ¿Estaría interesado en participar en una reunión con otras 6-8 personas para discutir este tema con más profundidad? A esta reunión estaríamos invitando a otras personas de esta comunidad/área que no devolvieron el cuestionario del censo. La reunión tomaría alrededor de 2 horas y la estaríamos haciendo en un lugar cerca de esta área. De participar, usted recibiría \$20 más los costos de transportación. También tendremos comida y una niñera en caso de que necesite traer a su hijo(a)..

¿Le interesaría participar? *(De la persona contestar en la afirmativa, entonces pídale la siguiente información:)* ¿Podría darme su **nombre, dirección y número de teléfono** para hacerle llegar la invitación en las próximas semanas? ¿Cuál sería el mejor día y la mejor hora para usted? *(Distinga entre día de la semana y fin de semana; horas del día o de la noche; mejor momento para reunirse y mejor momento para hablarle).* Muchísimas gracias por su cooperación y podríamos estarle llamando/dando más información en los próximos días.

Appendix B-1

PUERTO RICO EVALUATION FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL ENGLISH VERSION

INTRODUCTION--Thank you for coming here today/this evening. My name is (-----) and I will be leading the discussion. This is my colleague, _____. S/he will be helping by taking notes and making sure everything is functioning properly. We both work for Westat, a private company that is doing this study for the U.S. Census Bureau.

We are here to find out more about why people in Puerto Rico did not return their Census 2000 forms. We want to learn your reasons for not responding to the Census so that we can do better next time. We are here to learn from you. You are the experts; there are no right or wrong answers. Please feel free to speak your mind.

I also want to assure you that your answers will be kept strictly confidential. The researchers working on this project are the only people who will know who said what. The report that will be written will bring together the views expressed by all the people participating in these discussions across Puerto Rico, and no one will be identified by name. We will be tape recording the session so we can be sure to get the most accurate information. Are there any further questions about the study before I start to explain the rules for today's/tonight's session.

Has anyone participated in a focus group before? The rules are quite simple. Everyone has a name card in front of you, so I can call on you by name. First, we will go around the room and everyone will introduce themselves and say where they live. Then I will start by asking a question. Whoever wants to can be first to answer. Once that person has finished, someone else can speak. If you have something to say, but someone else is still talking, please raise your hand, and wait until I call on you. Everyone will have a turn.

LET'S FIRST GO AROUND THE TABLE. CAN EACH PERSON GIVE THEIR NAME AND WHERE THEY LIVE?

I. I'D LIKE TO START BY ASKING YOU TO THINK BACK A FEW MONTHS TO WHEN YOU FIRST GOT A LETTER TELLING YOU THE CENSUS FORM WOULD BE DELIVERED SOON, AND THEN, WHEN YOU RECEIVED THE ACTUAL FORM WITH THE QUESTIONS. WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION? (*Probe on whether the process worked as intended, whether the advance letter was read, whether the instructions about procedures and mailback were clear*).

II. BY THE TIME YOU RECEIVED YOUR FORMS, HAD YOU ALREADY HEARD ABOUT THE CENSUS FROM ANY OTHER SOURCES? (*Probe on sources such as television or radio ads, billboards, neighbors, newspapers, religious/church gatherings, from school-aged children*)? WHAT HAD YOU HEARD? AFTER YOU GOT THE FORM, DID YOU TALK TO ANYONE—A RELATIVE, FRIEND OR A NEIGHBOR-- ABOUT THE CENSUS? IF SO, HOW DID THOSE DISCUSSIONS INFLUENCE YOUR IDEAS ABOUT WHETHER TO RESPOND?

III. THERE ARE DIFFERENT POINTS AT WHICH A PERSON MIGHT DECIDE NOT TO RESPOND TO THE CENSUS—FOR EXAMPLE, ONE PERSON MIGHT NOT EVEN OPEN THE ENVELOPE, WHILE ANOTHER MIGHT GET PART WAY THROUGH THE FORM BEFORE DECIDING NOT TO CONTINUE. HOW FAR INTO THE PROCESS DID YOU GET? (*Probe on*

whether there were literacy issues, problems with understandability of questions or instructions, objections to content of questions ,etc)

IV. ALL IN ALL, WHAT WOULD YOU SAY IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT REASON YOU DID NOT RESPOND TO CENSUS 2000?

V. WHAT, IF ANYTHING, COULD HAVE BEEN DONE DIFFERENTLY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE YOU COMPLETE AND RETURN YOUR CENSUS FORM?

Appendix B-2

PUERTO RICO EVALUATION FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL SPANISH VERSION

Introducción:

Gracias por acompañarnos en el día de hoy. Mi nombre es (_____) y estaré dirigiendo la conversación que tendremos en esta (mañana, tarde, noche). Este(a) es mi compañero(a) (_____) y él (ella) estará tomando notas y pendiente a que la grabadora esté funcionando perfectamente. Ambos(as) trabajamos para Westat. Westat es una compañía privada localizada en Maryland que se dedica a hacer estudios para diferentes organizaciones.

Estamos aquí para aprender o conocer un poco más las razones que tuvieron las personas en Puerto Rico para no devolver por correo los cuestionarios del Censo 2000. Esta información nos ayudará a mejorar el proceso de enviar y recibir los cuestionarios en el próximo Censo. En este tipo de entrevista grupal no existen respuestas correctas (buenas) o incorrectas (malas) por lo que pueden sentirse en la libertad de hablar abiertamente sobre el tema.

Es importante enfatizar que sus respuestas son estrictamente confidenciales. Solamente los encargados de este estudio tendrán acceso a la información. El informe final incluirá los temas discutidos en las 12 entrevistas grupales que haremos por toda la isla por lo que ningún participante será identificado por el nombre. Como les informamos anteriormente, esta entrevista grupal será grabada para asegurarnos de tener la información completa. ¿Hay alguna pregunta sobre el estudio antes de comenzar? *(Los facilitadores deben leer y/o discutir la carta de confidencialidad y pedirles a los participantes que la firmen).*

¿Hay alguien que haya participado anteriormente en una entrevista grupal? Las reglas son bastante simples. Cada persona tiene en frente una tarjeta con su nombre, esto es para que se me haga más fácil el recordar sus nombres. Primero les voy a pedir que cada uno diga su nombre y cualquier otra información que ustedes quieran darnos. Después haré algunas preguntas y cualquiera de ustedes puede comenzar con la discusión. Cuando esa persona termine de hablar, otra puede seguir y así sucesivamente. Si usted quiere decir o añadir algo cuando haya alguien hablando, entonces levante su mano para entonces cederle el turno. ¿Alguna otra pregunta?

PRIMERO LES VOY A PEDIR QUE CADA PERSONA DIGA SU NOMBRE Y CUALQUIER OTRA INFORMACION PERSONAL QUE QUIERAN DARNOS. ¿QUIEN QUIERE EMPEZAR?

I: PARA COMENZAR, ME GUSTARIA PEDIRLES QUE PIENSEN CUANDO LES LLEGO, POR PRIMERA VEZ, LA CARTA QUE LES DECIA QUE RECIBIRIAN EL CUESTIONARIO DEL CENSO Y EN EL MOMENTO EN QUE RECIBIERON EL CUESTIONARIO. ¿CUAL FUE SU REACCION? *(Preguntar si el proceso resultó ser como se pretendía, si leyeron la carta y si las instrucciones sobre los procedimientos de llenar y devolver los cuestionarios estaban claros).*

2. ¿HABIAN ESCUCHADO O VISTO ALGUNA INFORMACION SOBRE EL CENSO PARA EL MOMENTO EN QUE LES LLEGO EL CUESTIONARIO? *(Preguntar sobre las fuentes de información; por ejemplo, anuncios de radio o televisión, reportajes, periódicos; tabloncitos de anuncios, afiches o "posters", vecinos, información provista en la iglesia/reuniones ecuménicas o por niños que están en la escuela)* ¿QUE FUE LO QUE ESCUCHARON? DESPUES DE HABER RECIBIDO EL CUESTIONARIO DEL CENSO, ¿USTEDES HABLARON CON ALGUN FAMILIAR, AMIGO O VECINO SOBRE EL CENSO? ¿DE QUE MANERA INFLUYERON ESAS CONVERSACIONES EN SU

DECISION DE ENVIARLO O NO?

3. HAY VARIOS PUNTOS EN EL PROCESO EN QUE UNA PERSONA PUDO HABER DECIDIDO NO CONTESTAR O DEVOLVER EL CENSO—POR EJEMPLO, UNA PERSONA PUDO HABER DECIDIDO NO ABRIR EL SOBRE MIENTRAS QUE OTRA PUDO HABER COMENZADO A CONTESTARLO Y LUEGO DE HABER LEIDO VARIAS PREGUNTAS DECIDIO NO CONTINUAR. ¿CUAN LEJOS LLEGARON USTEDES EN ESTE PROCESO? (*Ver si está o no relacionado con niveles de escolaridad, problemas entendiendo las preguntas y/o instrucciones, alguna objeción al contenido de las preguntas, etc.*)

4. ¿CUAL SERIA PARA USTEDES LA RAZON MAS IMPORTANTE PARA QUE USTEDES DECIDIERAN NO RESPONDER/DEVOLVER EL CUESTIONARIO DEL CENSO?

V. ¿QUE COSAS EL CENSO HUBIESE HECHO DIFERENTE, SI ALGUNA, PARA QUE USTEDES COMPLETARAN Y DEVOLVIERAN EL CUESTIONARIO?

Appendix C

PUERTO RICO EVALUATION OBSERVATION SUMMARY FOR FOCUS GROUPS

Name of Observer/co-moderator:

Name of Moderator:

Date and time of focus group:

Location: (**If there is anything remarkable about the meeting location (e.g., particular section of town, individual's home, or neighborhood characteristics) or the arrangements that went into the group, please comment briefly.)

1. Physical Setting: Brief description of setting in which meeting is taking place (e.g., type of building,, size and shape of room, arrangement of furniture, condition of the facilities, distracting noises, etc)

2. Participants List names of all participants.

Name	Home Address
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	
9.	

3. Seating Arrangement / Sociogram Please draw the seating arrangement and label who is sitting where.

- a. Place a check mark next to the person's name each time s/he speaks.
- b. (If not too distracting) Draw arrows showing who is addressing remarks to whom.



4. General observations As you observe the interactions among the participants, pay attention to the following issues (N.B. there may be other, relevant matters that are not listed below).

1. Facilitator's style and group's response to it;
2. Expression of views – openness of the group to voicing and hearing diverse opinions;
3. Non-verbal signals (e.g., body language);
4. Degree to which one person or subgroup is dominating the discussion;
5. Indications that there are divisions or tensions in the group and how these break down.

(Observations should contain more information than simply your perspective. For example, do not write, "Juan became angry," but rather "Juan seemed to get angry, as he raised his voice and pounded his fist on the table when he spoke." This will allow the reader to draw his/her own conclusions about the behavior and enhance our ability to interpret the findings.)

5. Overall Observations: Briefly summarize the tone and feel of the group, major themes that seemed to emerge from the session, and any additional comments that you believe will help us to interpret the transcript. Please also include any “lessons learned” as to what to do or not to do in the next group based on how this group went.